

Man's feelings are always purest and most glowing in the hour of meeting and of farewell.

~Jean Paul Richter

Beginnings and Endings—Introductions and Conclusions

The Hellos and Goodbyes of a well-written research paper

Introductions

Many students spend hours and hours trying to get that perfect opening paragraph. What most students do not realize is that the perfect introduction is usually written after the body of the paper is completed! Yes, the introduction is the *first impression* of your paper, and it is important to capture the reader's attention with an open discussion of the topic; however, the introduction outlines the direction your paper is going to take. The purpose of an introduction is as follows:

- orients readers
- prepares readers for the specific ideas presented in the body of the paper
- establishes the significance of the main idea
- sets the appropriate tone for the paper

When preparing the introduction, the author may need to make many mini-outlines of the main points to provide an organized, informative, road map of the essay.

To capture the reader's attention and give the essay an interesting start, try one of the following:

- ✓ Open with a **question**—Have you ever wondered how you would survive if you found yourself alone in the wilderness?
- ✓ Open with a **quotation**—"Boys and girls grow up in different worlds, but we think we're in the same one, so we judge each other's behavior by the standards of our own," states Deborah Tannen.
- ✓ Open with an **announcement**—This is not a class for the lazy. These topics are strictly for the student who wants to challenge their every degree of thought.
- ✓ Open with a **bold and challenging statement**—Contrary to what some people think, most of our learning takes place out of school.
- ✓ Open with a **short narrative or personal experience**—I am still glad that I did not cry at the funeral, though I did in my room later.
- ✓ Open with an **interesting fact**—Forty seven percent of women believe that spinach may cause their sudden death due to the recent ecoli outbreak.
- ✓ Open with a **riddle or a puzzle**—What textbook has no pages, is miles wide, smells like a creek, and has been around for millions of years? That is right—outdoor school!
- ✓ Open with an **opposite opinion**—The death penalty is a positive means as deterrence for crime when used consistently.
- ✓ Open with an **explanation of a term, paradox, or analogy**

Conclusions

The introduction of an essay is like the hypothesis of a good science experiment, while the conclusion is the result, or final analysis, of the experiment. The purpose of a strong conclusion contains the following elements:

- it provides the reader with a sense of closure

- it addresses the “so what?” question by discussing the ramifications or implications of what the writer has said in the body of the paper

When writing a great conclusion, do not repeat the introduction too closely. Instead, discuss how the material covered addressed a larger concern. A way to do this effectively is to quietly read the body of the paper and make notes on the “so what? who cares? what difference does it make?” questions. If these questions are answered appropriately within the essay, the conclusion will closely relate to all material covered.

Writing a conclusion is as difficult, maybe even more so, than writing an introduction. These are the last statements that the reader looks at; therefore, do not let a strong essay deflate with a weak conclusion. A strong conclusion does not state that something is proved, but rather invites the reader to find out more information by using verbs such as *seem, indicate, suggest, imply, may, and could*.

To end the essay with an interesting conclusion, try one of the following:

- ✓ Close with a question that involves the reader
- ✓ Close with a statement echoing an idea the essay has already hinted at
- ✓ Close with a hint of things to come
- ✓ Close with a statement showing some things will never be resolved
- ✓ Close with a personal comment or response
- ✓ Close with a strong statement suggesting the final conclusion you hope your reader will draw
- ✓ Close with an ending that lets the reader *fill in the blanks*
- ✓ Close with a forceful argument, persuading the reader in a particular direction

Some helpful guidelines

When writing powerful introductions and conclusions, use the following guidelines:

1. Write the introduction and conclusion *after* writing the body of the paper.
2. Think about introductions and conclusions as bridges—they connect the reader with the topic of the paper.
3. Imagine an inverted ▼ triangle for the introduction—begin with general ideas and move towards a more specific point. Provide background for the readers by determining what they already know and what they need to know to understand the context of the thesis. By the time the inverted point of the triangle is reached, state the thesis of the essay.
4. For the conclusion, rotate the triangle ▲ by restating the thesis and retracing the steps of the argument. This reminds the reader of how the important elements of the essay fit together to strengthen the overall point of the thesis statement.